The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 33 JUNE 12th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

The country has been stirred to its depths by the superb example of courage, endurance, discipline and unselfish loyalty displayed by the army, navy, air force and merchant navy of our own country and of France in the evacuation of the armies in Northern France.

THE SOLDIERLY QUALITY

Speaking in New York a fortnight ago, Lord Lothian said that the democracies had made the mistake of underrating, and even despising, the soldierly qualities, which were among the essential attributes of true manhood and citizenship. To be a soldier of the spirit, he added, was one of the specific marks of a true Christian.

That these qualities have only slumbered to spring to life in full splendour when occasion calls the events of the past month have shown. It has been the great mistake of the Fascist countries to think otherwise.

A graver question is how far the soldierly qualities are characteristic of the life of the Church. They are manifest in the religious orders and in the self-sacrificing lives of many individual clergy, ministers, and lay members of the Church. But the Church as a whole has been enfeebled by the enervating atmosphere of a long period of security and wealth. It has been too ready, like the democracies, to think that the demonic and savage element in life can be subdued by talk and pious resolutions. As a result, many to-day who are passionately convinced that the only hope for mankind lies in the rediscovery of Christianity have lost all belief in institutional Christianity because it has become divorced from a way of life.

Those of you who possess, or are able to beg or borrow, a copy of William James's *Talks to Teachers*, published at the turn of the century, should read again the chapter on "What makes a Life Significant." He describes a week which he spent at a large educational and religious gathering—the order and calm, the amiability and kindness, the absence of every villainy and crime, the almost complete triumph of the ideal. All that reformers for generations had toiled to bring about seemed for the moment to have been achieved. And yet with it all something vital and essential appeared to be lacking. It was with a sense of immense relief that he went back to the outer world to find there what alone can satisfy the soul of man—the element of *precipitousness*, of strength and strenuousness, intensity and danger.

We have not understood Nazism and Fascism unless we realise that their power lies in their appeal to these basic demands of human nature. What corresponding call is sounded in the present institutional life of the Church? It is a call which we have to learn to express somehow in action. If ideals by themselves were the important thing, parsons and professors, who possess a plentiful stock of them, would be the

first claimants for the crown of life. But we know in our secret hearts that the soldier ranks higher, and that it is the fighting quality in us that gives significance to our vocation, whatever it may be. It is the marriage of an ideal with some inner joy and courage, with some fidelity and endurance, that invests life with a satisfying and solid meaning. If we cling to life and ease, and another, however great his faults in other respects, is willing to fling them away, caring nothing for them, we cannot help, as William James says elsewhere, accounting him in the deepest way our superior.

The Church will need the soldierly qualities if it is to play its part in the immediate future. The strong, centralised State is here. Its policies and the whole temper of public life will be determined, as *The Tablet* said in a recent editorial, by the convictions of those who direct it and who are men before they are officials. As yet the centralised State in this country has no ideological character; those who hold the most diverse views about its purposes are united in a common effort to win the war. But when the war ends, the strong State will remain. The unprecedented powers which the modern State wields offer a strong temptation to the ambitious. If its policies are not inspired by Christian ideas, they will be determined by anti-Christian ideas. Of the greatness of the battle and of the vastness of the issues that are at stake few as yet have any inkling. If Christian ideas are to triumph, we need a new clarity and strength of purpose, a new discipline, cohesion and tenacity in carrying it out; a transformation of the life of the Church as radical as that which is taking place in the nation.

ARE WE FIGHTING THE GERMAN PEOPLE?

A vigorous and heated controversy—prompted by recent utterances of statesmen which contrast with speeches made earlier in the war—has been going on in the Press both of this country and of France as to whether we are fighting the Nazi tyranny or the German people as a whole. As often happens in controversies the issues are confused, and what one side wishes to affirm is not the same thing as what the other side is concerned to deny.

There can be little doubt that the German nation as a whole is behind Hitler. This is due in large part, as was shown in Supplement No. 21, to a political tradition which has been powerful in Germany for generations and to historical causes reaching still further back. The Nazi movement has made itself heir to all the tendencies in German thought which lead to the idolisation of the State, nation and race. In this sense Mr. Eden is right in saying that Hitler is not something distinct from the German nation, but the direct expression of a great part of it.

It appears certain, moreover, that the Nazis have succeeded — it is perhaps the most terrible of their crimes—in inoculating the mind of the great majority of German youth with this detestable and inhuman philosophy.

It is true also that war, with its threat to the national existence, arouses powerful emotions which weaken the power of rational resistance, and that the better elements in Germany, naturally hostile to the Nazi régime but responsive to the appeal of patriotism, have rallied to the support of the national cause.

All these things are facts and those who make the peace will have to reckon with them; though the range of facts to be taken into account is, of course, vastly wider than anything that can be said in a few paragraphs. It is not in the least Christian to ignore or gloss over facts. To pretend that the facts are what we should like them to be is sheer sentimentality. In the meaning covered by these facts it is true that we are fighting against the German people.

But it is also an undoubted fact that there are those in Germany—no one knows

how many—who hate the Nazi system and its brutalities, but are powerless as individuals to do anything against it. There are many more who are supporting the national cause but who are not yet enslaved by the Nazi spirit. War makes its appeal to one of the most deep-seated instincts in human nature—the love of country. The German people, moreover, are not only cut off from all news from the outside world except that which the government allows for its own purposes to reach them, but have the German view of the war instilled into their minds day by day by every form of direct statement and skilfully prepared suggestion. Against these insidious influences no human mind is immune. Only the overthrow of the present tyranny can open the eyes of those who are at present blinded, and create an opportunity for the better elements in Germany to assert themselves.

Hence while it is true in one sense that we are fighting the German people, it is in another sense both untrue and un-Christian to embrace the whole German people in a single, sweeping condemnation. This is to adopt the Nazi racial doctrine and let Christianity go.

Politically Germany must be dealt with as a nation. But Christianity is concerned primarily with men as persons; and the necessity of treating them as members of a nation, as for certain purposes we must treat them, can never be allowed to obscure the more significant fact that they are persons. The Germans are Germans, and we may not shrink from the consequences of that truth; but more fundamentally they are men, fellow-sinners like ourselves and equally with ourselves the objects of God's redeeming love.

The Minister of Information said with great pungency in a recent broadcast talk that German propaganda is trying to drive a wedge between us and our Allies and that if anyone tells us that the French have let us down we should reply " Either you are a paid agent of Germany, or else you are an unpaid one doing German propaganda for nothing. In either case your mouth should be shut and silenced because you are an enemy, and a most dangerous enemy, to the Allied cause."

The Christian who is called to fight on the Christian as well as on the military front is entitled to say with similar bluntness to anyone who attempts to identify all Germans, merely because they are of German race, with the evil creed and system against which we are fighting, " You are an agent of the false and devilish Nazi racial doctrine and an enemy of the Christian cause."

THE REFUGEE PROBLEM

The Christian conviction that men are essentially persons and not merely members of a class has an obvious bearing on our attitude to aliens. There need be no quarrel on Christian grounds with the Government policy of interning certain classes of aliens. The State must take whatever measures are required for the public safety; it is not the least of the evils which the Nazis have brought to the world that the methods to which they have had recourse have sown everywhere the seeds of suspicion and undermined the trust of men in one another so that precautionary measures have to be more drastic. All the evidence that has come to hand indicates that the policy of internment has been carried out with marked consideration and humanity, and I know of several notable acts of kindness and practical helpfulness by private individuals and groups.

But whatever restrictions may be necessary in the public interest, it must be remembered that very many of these Germans and Austrians are wholly innocent people and our friends. Some of them possess high qualifications which they desire to place at the service of this country, and which we can ill afford to lose at the present time.

At the outbreak of the war there were 82,500 refugees in this country, of whom 74,000 were from Germany and Austria. Of these 5,200 have emigrated. The recent orders for the internment of certain categories of these refugees and the imposition of curfew and other restrictions have created new problems both for the refugees themselves and for the voluntary organisations working on their behalf. These organisations are doing their utmost to discharge their responsibilities for the moral and spiritual welfare of refugees, interned or not. We can all share in the work by showing kindness to aliens in our reach, and by support of the voluntary refugee organisations. Every act of sympathy and help is an assertion, in face of rising hate, of the contrary life-giving principle of human solidarity. It is our Christian task to create a sane and discriminating public attitude towards aliens of all nationalities. We have a splendid opportunity of reawakening an understanding of the Christian Gospel of the worth of the individual person.

Enquiries about any matter relating to refugees will be welcomed by the Christian Council for Refugees from Germany and Central Europe, Bloomsbury House, Bloomsbury Street, W.C.1.

The problem has been greatly enlarged by the arrival of tens of thousands of refugees from Belgium and Holland. The care of these is being undertaken by the Women's Voluntary Services, Tothill Street, S.W.1, and, in districts where they are being billeted, by the local municipal authority.

It should also be remembered that besides the alien refugees there are thousands of British refugees from countries on the Continent, many of whom have lost everything and are in deep distress. They are being assisted by the British War Refugees Fund, 11, St. James's Square, W.1, of which Lord Halifax is the President.

THE SUPPLEMENT

The writer of the Supplement this week is a professor at the Russian Theological College in Paris. He is a Church Historian and the author of many important works on the history of the Russian Church.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

Bound Volumes. — We are sorry that we have not yet been able to send out the bound volumes of the first twenty-six issues of the News-Letter, and that the many subscribers who have sent us their own copies to be bound have not yet had these returned to them. There has been unavoidable delay in the printing of the index to be bound in with all volumes. We will despatch the volumes as soon as they are ready, which we hope will be in about two weeks' time.

Subscriptions. — The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. ($3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. 6d. for three months.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by St. Clements Press, Ltd., Portugal Street, London, W.C.2.

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

JUNE 12th, 1940

The Supplement
No. 33

A RUSSIAN VOICE

By G. FEDOTOV

I am deeply thankful to the editor of the Christian News-Letter for inviting me to write in its columns. My first thought was: What right have I, a foreigner, to speak upon the tragic conflict which the British nation is going through? My second thought was: This conflict is not a national one. Its bearing extends largely beyond the frontiers of one single country. However much abused, the slogan contains a fundamental truth: "The whole of our civilisation is at stake." Christian? European? Græco-Roman? Never mind. We all, Russians included, belong to it. We live and die with it.

THE WORLD'S DESTINY AT STAKE

I speak out of full conviction, and not from a vain taste for paradox. There is not one nation, not one country, who could gain by the victory of Germany. Not even Germany itself. Strange as it may sound, the most unhappy and the most wronged in the case of a German victory would be the German people. Apart from a demonic lust for power, what would the victory of their arms mean to the Germans? The perpetuation of slavery, the uprooting of Christianity, the perversion of youth, a great culture dying out with the last remnants of intellectual freedom. The only chance for Germany's future, for its freedom and development, is now its defeat. Through heavy sacrifices, through blood and humiliation, willingly accepted, lies Germany's purgatorial way. Even in the case (most fatal for Europe) that the victorious democracies were to exploit their victory in a vindictive and selfish spirit, their victory remains Germany's only chance.

THE COMMON CRISIS

I do not believe this war has been caused by the guilt or sin of one single nation or group of nations. The sin is our common sin, not that of a nation, but of an age—our age. The decay of our European culture, in its moral foundations, took on during the last decades an accelerated and catastrophic tempo. The Great War gave the last blow. One after the other, European nations have passed through an acute stage of social disintegration and fallen into the abyss. They have risen out of the depths of despair and unbelief, in a last convulsive attempt towards a totalitarian reconstruction. The reconstruction is fictitious: not the beginning of a new life, but the last spasm of an old, dying culture. The fallen nations were most unlike in all respects: Germany was perhaps the most cultured, Russia the most backward, country in Europe. A series of particular circumstances, mostly arising from the consequences of the Great War, selected and marked these particular nations for the first victims (they are victims, even though executioners). But all of the others, the "healthy ones," carry the germs of corruption in their blood.

THE NECESSARY ACTION

It is clear that, in order to overcome the crisis a tremendous internal effort is needed. First of all a social effort, tending to create a new social and international order. But it is also clear to all that no social order can be durable without a moral order, a common measure of moral values. And it becomes clearer every day that the moral order is impossible without a religious one—a common system of dogmas, or a common faith. The restoration of the Christian world order was and remains the sole condition for the restoration of Europe. The democracies have lost much time since the Peace of Versailles, a short and precious time much needed for the work of reconstruction. And now, when the war broke out, all other work has to be postponed. Yet we are bound to build, with the sword in our hands. The most successful and victorious war is unable to solve, by itself, any social or moral problem. It will at best involve us in the same intricate plight in which we were living at the time of the ambiguous

peace. On the other hand, without winning the war, no social reconstruction is possible, not even a moral one. Our world would end in general barbarism. The inward hierarchy of values, as well as the casual connection of things, implies the following order of issues: religion, morals, economics, politics, war. Yet the order of urgency is the opposite: war, politics, economics, morals, religion.

POTENTIALITIES OF THE WAR

The war, checking the whole constructive work of nations and bringing them all to the verge of ruin, nevertheless creates some new chances of salvation. It makes the political and social fabric of the world more plastic. Up to the present day this plasticity of post-war life has been used mainly in the selfish interests of the victors. Why not use it in the interests of the general order and justice? The last war made the first step, creating the League of Nations. This war can, indeed, bring with it what seemed a year ago absolute utopia: a federation of nations. The main obstacle to it, the unlimited sovereignty of the national state, is being eliminated by the war itself. The small neutral states lose their independence one after the other. They will necessarily come to the conviction that only in the frame of the federation will they be able to save what can still be saved of their freedom and self-government. The two belligerents, France and Britain, have already begun to combine their military operations and to pool their economic and financial means. The nucleus of a new commonwealth is already created by the war itself.

Still more powerful is the moral effect of the war. This can be a double one. Hatred, fear, greed, despair are the ordinary satellites of Mars. Yet the war may bring about a moral shock of quite a different kind. Man can hear through it the call of God. While everything is crumbling down about him, the things eternal are suddenly revealed in a flash of lightning. And in this new light man can see all the things of this world. He sees the relativity of much that he had thought absolute before. He is prepared to judge the world and to remake it. Without a salutary moral shock, there can be no moral rebirth and hardly a new social order at all. And the war *can* bring about such a shock. The consequences of it rest with human freedom.

GREAT BRITAIN'S RESPONSIBILITY.

Providence has given Great Britain the predominant part in this fateful war. It is not by mere chance that the totalitarian world has found its opposite pole in the British Commonwealth. This obvious fact lays upon Great Britain the greatest honour as well as the heaviest responsibility. I believe, out of my own personal experience, that, among the decaying and apostate nations Great Britain (with the northern Protestant countries) has preserved most of the Christian tradition. In morals, if not in dogmas, the overwhelming majority of the nation still accepts the Christian standards. Most of this Christian inheritance is, of course, but a survival. The Victorian age, so much decried and mocked at, is still responsible for the moral standard of Great Britain. Nevertheless, British Christianity is very conscious of moral problems, of the new world to be created. It is not content to be a survival. And in the whole life of the nation, Christian forces are the most progressive, the most promising, really leading towards a better future.

The radical transformation of the British State from the empire to the commonwealth makes it particularly well prepared for understanding and undertaking a new international order. What means to others a complete revolution of ideas, of traditions, self-denial and leaping into the void, is for Britain but an enlargement of her long historical experience.

The temptation, in the case of Great Britain, is not of too much, but of too little, i.e., not of overruling, but of detachment, of retreat; of weakness, not of violence. Please God that the burden assumed by or rather laid upon Great Britain may be carried by her up to the rightful end.

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